DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 355 788 FL 021 051

AUTHOR Mosadomi, Tola
TITLE Bridging High School and College Language Classes through the Multicultural Approach: The Case of Francophone Africa.
PUB DATE 93
NOTE 7p.; For serial issue in which this paper appears, see FL 021 050.
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Viewpoints (Opinion/Position Papers, Essays, etc.) (120) -- Journal Articles (080)
JOURNAL CIT Mid-Atlantic Journal of Foreign Language Pedagogy; v1 p13-18 Spr 1993

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Articulation (Education); *Cultural Awareness; Foreign Countries; *French; Higher Education; High Schools; *Multicultural Education; Second Language Instruction; Second Language Learning; *Teaching Methods
IDENTIFIERS *Francophone Africa

ABSTRACT

The multicultural approach to French language teaching and learning brings richer and more culturally diverse elements into the classroom and makes learning more enjoyable. While it improves people's understanding of other cultures, it is also a faster and more economic way to learn about them. The gap between foreign language education in high schools and colleges or universities must be narrowed until it becomes completely bridged; a multicultural approach can do this and more. Knowledge of the French language should not be limited to the "mother nation" only but should include the French Caribbean, French Canada, the Francophone of South-East Asia, French-speaking Europe and Africa, and Louisiana. (VWL)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED355788

BRIDGING HIGH SCHOOL AND COLLEGE LANGUAGE CLASSES THROUGH THE MULTICULTURAL APPROACH: THE CASE OF FRANCOPHONE AFRICA

Tola Mosadomi
Hampden-Sndney College
Hampden-Sydney, VA

Abstract

With the former French colonies gaining independence in the 60's, it has become imperative to recognize cultural plurality in foreign language curriculum, in a world that is getting smaller by the day. When French language and literature texts reflect the multiplicity of cultural perspectives, it then becomes clear that a broad effort is being made toward establishing support for an increasingly diverse and inclusive curriculum.

Today, French language teachers face a 'holistic foreign language education' problem. A dangerously inadequate interpretation of our national goal is to limit our knowledge of French language to that of the mother nation only. When we speak of 'Le monde francophone', we should not forget the French Caribbean, French Canada, the Francophone of South-East Asia, French-speaking Europe and Africa, and Louisiana, whose language and cultures should not be ignored.

A regional background survey that I did on attitudes on 'la Francophonie' will help us understand reactions to the inclusion of Francophone Identities in foreign language education.

For French teachers to create an appreciation of diversity and an expression of global awareness through cultural investigation, even at the elementary level, such topics as 'le transport au Gabon', 'le marche malgache', 'les saisons au Canada', or 'les habits en Guadeloupe' can be taught. But in order to do this, the teacher needs to access information through the embassies, the native speakers, as well as by attending regional and international Francophone conferences.

It is by so doing that French language educators will, in the words of 'Virginia Principles of Foreign Languages in Schools', "help students understand and appreciate people of different nationalities and ethnic groups and their contributions to the development of our nation", a principle that is most nationally embraced.

It's a small world and getting smaller day by day. With the former French colonies gaining independence from their 'mother' nation in the 60's, it is imperative that we recognize cultural plurality within the colonies.. The physical and structural changes in the world today that affect our national goals and objectives at all levels of education and in all subject areas, including foreign languages, cannot be ignored.

There is a gap between high school and college French language classes that can be successfully bridged through a multicultural approach with specific reference to Francophone Africa. In order to do this, we must first recognize some of the problems leading to the creation of this gap, problems that are an integral part of an overall dilemma facing foreign language education today.

It is important to note that there is a concern that encompasses the whole world not only the foreign language teaching process in the United States. There is therefore need for multicultural approach to language studies at all levels.

FL 021051

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Joseph Wieczorek

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☒ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy

The idea of multicultural approach to teaching foreign languages dates back to 3000 B.C. when, according to Higgs (1985:13), Titone recognized that the essence of teaching foreign languages is "to communicate with foreign peoples." In 1977, almost 5000 years later, Virginia's Department of Education expressed as one of its guiding principles of foreign language education in *Foreign Languages in Virginia Schools* (1977:1), the need "to help students understand and appreciate people of different nationalities and ethnic groups and their contributions to the development of our nation and culture." Other states have similar goals.

However, our interpretation of this goal is dangerously inadequate with regard to our understanding of other cultures. For example, "communicating with foreign peoples" in French language studies does not limit us to communicating with people **only** from France ailthough textbooks still persist. Similarly, "understanding and appreciating people of different nationalities and ethnic groups" in a French language curriculum should not be limited to understanding and appreciating only the 'mother' nation. A closer look at these policies implies that we should learn the **language** and **cultures** of the **peoples** who speak that foreign language. When we speak of 'Le monde francophone', we should not forget the French Caribbean, French Canada, the Francophone of the Southeast Asia, and French-speaking Europe and Africa, and closer to home, the state of Louisiana and New England, all of whose language and cultures can be included as needed in the French language or literature curriculum.

Not integrating many different Francophone cultures into French grammar texts is a curricula problem. But this problem is part of a broader and more serious problem—that of the ironic decline in foreign language enrollment at a time when there is an compelling need for increased cultural contact with countries all over the world. Jean Seligmann (1991:36) in a Newsweek article "Speaking in Tongues" cited Senator Paul Simon, a long-time foreign-language advocate, as saying "cultural isolation is a luxury the United States can no longer afford."

According to the 1979 Presidential Commission Report on Foreign Languages and International Studies, statistics show that "only 15 percent of American high school students now study a foreign language, down from 24 percent in 1965, and that only one of the twenty public high school students studies French, German or Russian beyond the second year." It was also found that "only 8 percent of American colleges and universities now require a foreign language for admission, compared with 34 percent in 1966." This decline was further corroborated by Seligman (1991:36) who says that "today, only about 5 percent of children in U. S. elementary schools study a foreign language, and *none* of the 50 states requires a language course for all high school students (though the District of Columbia does)."

The Presidential Commission Report also states that in some elementary and secondary schools, foreign language instruction is almost disappearing. So, then, how do these problems translate into bridging the gap between high school and college classes?

If foreign languages in secondary schools are supposed to help students "appreciate and understand people of different origins," and there is a decline in the student enrollment in foreign language studies, it then means that fewer people will be linguistically engaged in "understanding people of different origins." Similarly, lower enrollment in secondary schools translates to lower enrollment in college and university foreign language classes. The cycle continues, ultimately

resulting in a shortage of foreign language teachers who can impart to students their knowledge of other foreign cultures.

Not only do we have a shortage of foreign language educators and a decline in student enrollment, but there is also a crucial problem with the foreign language teacher's knowledge of the subject in terms of what I would describe as holistic foreign language education. We can refer to this problem in the teaching of the French language and literature, as "Francophone Identities." This is an area in which many high school teachers and college professors of French have expressed limited knowledge or complete ignorance. In order to clearly understand this problem, I did a background survey on attitudes on "la Francophonie" at the Francophone Conference organized by the French Department of Hampden-Sydney College at Hampden-Sydney, VA for Virginia high school French teachers. Out of the 27 participants who took time to fill in the questionnaire, my data shows that

1.
   a. none of the participants had ever heard of Francophone African Literature at home.
   b. 44.4% (12 out of 27) had their first encounter of Francophone African Literature at school.
   c. 29.6% (8 out of 27) learned about Francophone African Literature through self-studies (i.e. journals, magazines, textbooks).
   d. 26.0% had no prior knowledge of it.

2.
   a. 74.1% (20 out of 27) had studied African Literature in general.
   b. 25.9% had no prior knowledge of it.

3.
   a. 88.8% expressed an interest in studying African Literature in French.

4.
   a. 92% (25 out of 27) were interested in studying Francophone Literature in general.
   b. 7.4% (2 out of 27) did not fill in this part of questionnaire or did not respond.

5.
   a. 85.2% (23 out of 27) were interested in introducing Francophone Literature into their school curriculum.
   b. 14.8% (4 out of 27) did not respond.

From the above data, several deductions can be made:

A significant proportion of participants had no prior knowledge of Francophone Africa. Also, less than half of the participants had encountered Francophone African studies at school. Interestingly enough, a huge number of participants expressed interest in the inclusion of Francophone studies, in general, in their French language curricula. However, there is no significant increase in the number of those interested in Francophone studies in general and in Francophone African studies. This shows that there is a conscious but slow effort being made by

foreign language educators (in this case, French) to present French to students as a language spoken by many cultures throughout the world, not just in Europe.

The limitations of this statistical data should also be taken into consideration in the sense that the survey is limited to a few participants from only one state, though participants were from various secondary schools of the same state. It would be more interesting to survey across the states and different secondary schools for greater reliability. This effort is already being made.

Largely, results of this survey show that bringing a multicultural approach to the foreign language classroom can create an appreciation of diversity and an expression of global awareness. It also implies that the inclusion of Francophone studies in a French curriculum requires a conscious effort toward establishing an increasingly diverse and inclusive curriculum. Such a curriculum not only indicates a multicultural competency, but also reduces the frustration and ignorance of high school teachers and eventually their students when the latter get to college. There is a clear indication of this ignorance on the part of many students from lower to upper level college classes. It is worthwhile to note, however, that a growing proportion of high school teachers are beginning to introduce 'Francophone identities' in their French language curricula, as have a few college French professors.

In an admittedly incomplete survey of introductory French texts I did, it was found that only a few authors make mention of French culture outside that of France. Perhaps we shouldn't be surprised that such a large number of writers have not paid attention to other Francophone cultures, and perhaps we shouldn't be surprised also that a lot more people are showing an increased interest in the study of Francophone Identities'. In order to bridge the gap between high school and college French classes through a multicultural approach, we should consider the work of Crawford and Lange with regard to language and culture.

Crawford and Lange (1985:138-148) have established the relationship between language and culture: learning the French language is also learning the French culture. But teachers of French need to inform themselves about learning across cultures and teaching the same. French students should not have to wait until they get to college before they learn about other existing Francophone cultures. While teaching *Les courses*, for example, to beginner French classes either at high school or college level, the teacher can introduce simultaneously *Le marché en plein air* (Open-air market) in France, and, say, in Madagascar, an island located off the Southeast coast of Africa. The teacher can also compare and contrast the transportation system in France with that of Haiti, Martinique or Guadeloupe in the Caribbean, or with that of Gabon in Central Africa.

Cultural investigation studies, which provide an excellent source of introducing Francophone studies in the classroom, can be geographical or historical in context. The teacher as well as the students should be resourceful in bringing their cultural research findings to class. By so doing, teachers as well as students can begin to establish cultures that are similar or dissimilar. According to Crawford and Lange, when students are responsible for searching for cultural information, both teachers and students can identify, determine and establish similarities and differences across cultures in the language class (1985:147). Cultural investigation studies can include family, city and rural life, food and clothing, marriage and funeral ceremonies, education,

transportation, and youth and songs, among many others. For example, concerning food, a student can begin by saying

> *Dans mon pays, Madagascar, on mange du varisosoa (du riz avec beaucoup d'eau) ou de l'igname pour le petit déjeuner. Pour le déjeuner, on mange surtout du riz sec accommodé de légumes et de viandes, et pour le dîner, on peut manger encore du riz, avec des légumes. Le repas traditionnel ne se termine pas par un dessert parce qu'on mange des fruits quand on les trouve et il y en a en abondance!*

On the topic of clothing, for example, another student can begin by saying

> *Je suis togolais. Le Togo se trouve dans l'ouest de l' Afrique. On porte le boubou ou le pagne toute l'année au Togo.*

Another student supposedly from France can say what he wears in winter, summer or spring, or better still, what he wears all year round. All these students can present pictures of these cultural phenomena. One should note that discussing weather can also lead to teaching about clothes people wear. In this circumstance and in many others, geographical content and cultural information cannot be separated. Cultural information through shared experiences in the form of role playing can be very exciting in the language classroom. Through cultural-investigation studies, a great deal can be learned. The importance of studying a foreign language through the combination of language and culture cannot be overstressed. So, what can we do to begin changing language studies to include other French cultures and thereby bridge the gap in French language classes at all levels?

Following are several ways in which French teachers can access information to Francophone studies.

(1) The high school teacher or college French professor can attend regional Francophone conferences. National Francophone conferences can also be attended if funds are available.
(2) For professional development, teachers can take continuing education studies in colleges and universities that offer Commonwealth Literature studies.
(3) Teachers of all educational levels are strongly encouraged to participate in community-sponsored programs like regional Francophone conferences, organized by colleges and universities, which feed into the larger conferences, such as C.I.E.F. (Congrès International d'Etudes Francophone).
(4) Teachers of all educational levels have the opportunity to access the foreign embassies for all information they need to promote language and culture in schools and colleges.

I would like to add one of the recommendations made by the Presidential Commission toward enhancing the study of foreign languages and cultures in general:

(5) High school teachers who participate in such conferences should be offered incentives such as credits towards certification or recertification. Also there could be special recognition awards for excellence in achievement in such programs (1979:37).

By acquiring and imparting the knowledge of Francophone world, high school teachers broaden their own horizons as well as those of their students, and this excellent legacy of

education is carried into college education and beyond. After all, a knowledge once acquired is a knowledge for ever, and knowledge that is reactivated through continuous studies becomes living knowledge. Isn't this what education is all about - a continuous but gradual learning process from elementary school to college from childhood to adulthood, and beyond?

Multicultural approach to French language teaching and learning brings a richer and culturally diverse elements into the classroom and makes learning more fun. While it improves people's understanding of other cultures, it is also a faster and more economic way to learn about them. The gap between foreign language education in high schools and colleges or universities must be narrowed until it becomes completely bridged, and a multicultural approach can do this and more.

References:

Crawford-Lange, Linda and Dale Lange. 1985. "Doing the Unthinkable in the Second Language Classroom," in Teaching for *Proficiency, the Organizing Principle*. Chicago: National Textbook Company.

Seligman, Jean. 1991 "Speaking in Tongues." *Newsweek Special Issue* 36-37.

President's Commission on Foreign Language and International Studies. 1979. *Strength Through Wisdom: A Critique of U.S. Capability*. Washington: GPO.

Virginia. 1977. Department of Education. *Foreign Languages in Virginia Schools: Philosophy and Objectives/What is Language?/The Language Learner*. Richmond, Virginia. Department of Education.